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FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6402  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHCHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TIRANA 000989

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/09/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [AL](#)  
SUBJECT: ALBANIA: READOUT OF NOVEMBER 7 INTERAGENCY  
EVALUATION VISIT

REF: A) TIRANA 967 B) TIRANA 974 C) TIRANA 463 D)  
TIRANA 885

Classified By: Ambassador John L. Withers II, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

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1. (C) The Interagency Team led by USNATO Ambassador Nuland on November 7 provided clear benchmarks toward NATO integration to Albania's President Topi, Prime Minister Berisha and key Ministers, and a group of Parliamentarians. She explained that the USG and other NATO Allies will start making national decisions after the Membership Action Plan (MAP) cycle ends in February 2008 whether or not to invite Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia to join NATO, with an Alliance decision at the Bucharest Summit in April. She stressed three areas in which the GOA needs to show concrete progress in the next three months in order to be in the best position for an invitation:

- judicial reform - implement existing legislation and draft new laws to strengthen judiciary independence and the rule of law; a key indicator will be the GOA's appointment of an effective, independent, highly-qualified jurist to replace recently-ousted Prosecutor General Theodor Sollaku;
- electoral reform - make progress toward establishing a functioning civil registry and developing an ID card system; and
- trafficking - continue fighting all kinds of trafficking and ensure that returning victims of human trafficking receive necessary help.

Nuland stressed that Albania must sustain progress in military reforms, economic growth, and good neighborly relations and advised her interlocutors that Albania's help is needed to keep peace in the region, particularly with respect to Kosovo and ethnic tensions in Macedonia. Senior Albanians must continue their full court press in more skeptical European capitals as well.

2. (C) President Topi, Prime Minister Berisha, and Foreign Minister Basha highlighted Albania's progress in implementing MAP reforms and cited statistics showing results in law enforcement, corruption and economic indicators. Acknowledging that corruption was still a serious problem, the GOA representatives were optimistic that a new Prosecutor General would help the GOA fulfill its campaign promise to reduce corruption significantly. End Summary.

The Last Coaching Session

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13. (U) USNATO Ambassador Victoria Nuland led an Interagency team including D/AS for Defense Daniel Fata, NSC NATO Director Toby Bradley, EUR/SCE Director Christopher Hoh, JCS J5 Col. Mark Shields, USNATO Enlargement Officer Thomas Underwood, and Enlargement Officer Matthew Thompson to meet with GOA officials on November 7 to assess Albania's progress on MAP reforms.

14. (C) Ambassador Nuland drove home a similar message throughout the day: Albania must continue to work hard on judicial and electoral reforms and on reducing trafficking. She underscored that Albania must make concrete, demonstrable progress in these areas by February. Nuland stressed that some Allies are not as supportive of Albania's invitation as the GOA may think and that GOA officials must step up marketing efforts to make sure skeptical Allies understand how much progress Albania has made. Ambassador Nuland also advised the PM that if Albania is invited to join NATO, it will have to show that it can protect NATO's classified material and must devote resources to this effort.

Basha Leads Off  
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15. (C) FM Basha told the team that electoral and judicial reforms are the two main pillars of Albania's MAP, and was confident the process would move forward. (See also Ref B.) He considered Albania's biggest problem to be its lack of professional capacity at all levels, something which will take time to remedy. On electoral reform, Basha cited progress on the technical front: a new civil registry system recently launched with the help of Austria and the OSCE, and the imminent tender for biometric ID cards and passports. The new documents should be ready by next summer. However,

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he said that legislative issues, such as districting and proportional representation, are much more complicated, given Albania's culture and history, and would not be completed before next summer.

The PM Lists the GOA's Achievements  
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16. (C) PM Berisha assembled key ministers (Basha - MFA, Mediu - Defense, Rusmajli - Justice, Bregu - Integration, Bode - Finance, Ruli - Economy, and Nishani - Interior), but was the group's sole speaker. After a long recitation of Albania's recent reform successes, he received Nuland's list of incomplete homework in a constructive spirit, and pledged to do the hard work necessary to have a good story to tell NATO at his mid-January MAP presentation. He admitted that organized crime was still a big problem, but cited Italian statistics showing trafficking to Italy was declining. He attributed this to better border controls, implementation of the new Albanian State Police Law, and an organized crime task force consisting of prosecutors, criminal police, and tax inspectors (the Joint Investigativ Unit, Ref C).

17. (C) Berisha's list of successes included the fight against corruption, which he expected to accelerate next year with a new Prosecutor General. He was adamant about passing legislation to remove immunity, saying that no one should be above the law. He was also proud of his government's economic achievements, citing an improved business climate from the recently implemented business registration centers ("one stop shop"), a ten percent flat tax, reduced social contributions, and the GOA's "one euro" initiative. He claimed that these programs, plus the fact that Albania has the lowest production costs of any European country, have greatly increased the flow of investment into Albania. He pointed also to the e-government initiatives under the MCA Threshold Project, which he said have saved the country money by increasing efficiency while reducing opportunities for bureaucratic corruption. To maintain that momentum for the future, he is doubling the education budget, plans to have

internet in every school by the end of 2008, and has been talking to Cisco and Microsoft to open technical academies in Albania. Berisha told the team that the government understands how important property rights are and is working on a land cadastre which will marry citizens' property registrations with a new aerial map by the end of July. On foreign policy, he urged the delegation to take a measured approach in encouraging Macedonia to move forward with reforms and to better its relations with Greece. He criticized the EU's recent SAA report on Macedonia as being too harsh.

President Topi  
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18. (C) Ambassador Nuland told Topi that he has an opportunity to show he is "the President for all Albanians" by selecting a Prosecutor General with a clean, professional reputation able to receive broad support. She stressed the importance of marketing Albania until it has a positive reputation around kitchen tables in Allied countries. The President told the team that the U.S. is the greatest friend Albania has. He was pleased with Albania's accomplishments on its MAP but acknowledged that it has more to do. Many of his comments were focused on regional issues with Kosovo and Macedonia, about whose relations with Greece and its treatment of the Albania minority he voiced concerns.

Parliamentarians  
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19. (C) The team met with the Co-Chairs of Parliament's Ad-hoc NATO Committee, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Security Committee, and the two deputy Speakers. (Each pair represents one opposition and one majority MP.) While acknowledging disagreements among them, the MPs said that Parliament is committed to ensuring the stability of the democratic process in Albania and focuses on keeping in step with European positions. They cited recent legislation increasing sentences for terrorism-related activities and gender/ethnic crimes. Ambassador Nuland told them they need to continue working on deepening and strengthening the judicial reform process and to promote legislation stressing fairness and transparency. She said the Allies are looking at the political maturity of the MPs as well as the strength and irreversibility of reforms. Following the team's departure, parliamentarians of both sides referred publicly

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to the need for cooperative efforts on NATO-related reforms.

Exporting Security  
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110. (C) Ambassador Nuland stressed to all interlocutors the importance of Albania being a good neighbor and counselor to Kosovo and Macedonia. The PM described Albania as a country of religious tolerance that had never had problems with religious differences or ethnicity, making it a good candidate to calm such tensions in the region. President Topi, voicing concern about Macedonia, mentioned that he had recently met with President Crvenkovski and cautioned him about possible fallout from slow implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. He also met with the leaders of Macedonia's two ethnic Albanian parties, urging dialogue to defuse the tension which has lasted between them for almost two years. Topi will continue to work with the leaders to try to calm tensions after the previous day's police operation in Tetovo. The Parliamentarians as well echoed the need to remain engaged with ethnic Albanians in the region and mentioned several Parliamentary meetings and outreach efforts which included the Kosovars.

111. (C) In a separate meeting, DefMin Mediu told Fata and Shields that he is working with the opposition to reach consensus on sending an additional company to Iraq, as

promised to the U.S. (Ref D). Mediu had spoken of the issue to a mixed group of parliamentarians the previous day and received initial support.

¶12. (U) Ambassador Nuland's press conference was widely covered by the broadcast and print media. She thanked Albania for its troop contributions, saying that Albania had changed from a security importer to a global security exporter. The media focused on her comment that Albania was not ready at this moment to join NATO. Reactions from across the politically-polarized media spectrum ranged from criticism that the GOA was not doing enough to optimism on how far the GOA had progressed.

Comment

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¶13. (C) Ambassador Nuland and the interagency team clearly left their GOA interlocutors fired up and cautiously optimistic. A year after the shock of their substandard MAP submission in Brussels, the message they took from the visit is that Albania is again on the right track, and can attain the goal of an invitation to NATO with sustained effort in a few key areas. In sum, Nuland's message struck home: Albania has hard work to do, and little time in which to do it, if its NATO goal is to be reached.

¶14. (U) Ambassador Nuland has cleared this cable.  
WITHERS